THE Wiſdom of Believing: IN TWO SERMONS Preach'd at COURT, *April* 7, and 14. 1700.

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Publiſh'd by His MAJESTY's Command.

LONDON:

Printed by *J. M.* for *Walter Kettilby*, at the *Biſhop's Head* in St. *Paul's* Church-Yard. 1700.

SERMON I.

ROM. i. 22.

Profeſſing themſelves to be wiſe, they became Fools.

WHatever Value we ſet upon being Wiſe, or whatever Affectation we have of being ſo accounted; yet there is no greater Argument of Human Weakneſs than This, That we rarely know what we mean by *Wiſdom*; nor are our Notions any where more confuſed than upon this Queſtion, What it is to be Wiſe?

To extricate our Thoughts in ſome meaſure out of this Confuſion, we may diſtinguiſh *Wiſdom* into *Three* Kinds, *viz.*

The *Wiſdom of Grace*,
The *Wiſdom of Nature*, and
The *Wiſdom of Imagination.*

I. The *Wiſdom of Grace* is called in Scripture; the *Wiſdom from above*; becauſe thence it cometh, and we cannot attain it without the Influence of God. Now the Power and Uſe of this Wiſdom is to ſecure our Eternal Intereſt, by the Means of Holy Living and Conformity to the Divine Will: And becauſe this is our main Concern, and all the reſt is but Loſs and Shame and Miſery without it, the Style of the Holy Spirit allows nothing to be Wiſdom but purely This, *The Fear of God, that is Wiſdom*; And our Apoſtle, who had large Talents of other Knowledge, which he might have boaſted of, if they could juſtifie the boaſting; ſtyles all *Fooliſhneſs*, none worth the owning, *but to know Chriſt Jeſus, and the power of his Reſurrection.* He that has this Wiſdom has ſufficient; and without it, the greater our pretences are to Wiſdom, the more conſpicuous is our Folly.

II. The *ſecond* Kind of Wiſdom is that of *Nature*, *i. e.* ſuch as Men may have of *themſelves*, thro' the Power of their native Faculties, and the Improvements of Induſtry

ſtry and Obſervation. And from this Fountain has flow'd many commendable Fruits in all Ages; All Rules and Arts for the Conduct, Employment, and Accommodation of Life. But foraſmuch as this Wiſdom is often ſeparate from that of *Grace*, ſo it as often turns to Subtilty and Artifice, to Doubling and Inſincerity, to Deceiving and being deceived. This is that Wiſdom whereby our Saviour ſays, *The Children of the World are wiſer in their Generation than the Children of Light*: Wiſer *in their Generation*, *i. e.* Wiſer to ſerve themſelves in reference to preſent Advantages. Not that Worldly Men are therefore eſteemable to have the better Underſtandings: It were in a manner Blaſphemous to think, That Godlineſs did ever occaſion Stupidity; or that it ever was occaſion'd by it. The Good Man knows as many Methods of Management; but the Worldly Man is bolder to make uſe of all he knows: The Good Man walks on ſimply in the Road of Providence, believing God's Bleſſing to be his beſt Portion; But the Worldly Man turns into every crooked Way; as if it were to make himſelf amends for the want

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of that Providence and Bleſſing he has no mind to truſt upon: The Good Man looks upon the World as his Inn; and therefore is not ſo ſollicitous for his Accommodations here, as he is for his Arrival at his Journey's End: But the Worldly Man looks upon it as his Home; and therefore imploys all his Care and Intention to make it as eaſie and entertaining to him as he can. For Example;

In the firſt Age of the World, *Cain* is ſaid to *have gone forth from the preſence of God*, *i.e.* To have caſt off all Care of Religion; And this Perſonal Inclination of His form'd all his Poſterity to be Profane: On the other ſide, *Seth walked with God*, and inſtituted his Poſterity to the ſame pious Care of being Religious. In the mean time we may obſerve, That the Chief Inventions, which ſerve both to the Uſe and Divertiſement of the preſent Life, as the Forming of Societies, Building of Cities, and finding out curious Arts and Manufactures are all attributed to the Profane Line: But it would be very Raſh for all this to conclude, That theſe were the Men of better Parts and Capacities than the other. The Children

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of *Seth* accounted it ſufficient for their Happineſs to be contented with what was needful, and to purſue the favour of God as the Conſummation of their Enjoyments, which is undoubtedly the Supreme Wiſdom. Whereas the other being deſtitute of hopes from God, made it all their ſtudy to procure ſuch Enjoyments to themſelves as might be had without Him. But let us obſerve a little further, and ſee what the World it ſelf was the better for all theſe iſſues of it's Wiſdom: In the power of it Men brought in many agreeable Advantages; but thro' the Corruption of it they likewiſe brought in the Flood; wherein all were deſtroyed but thoſe few that had eſcaped the common Depravation. And what then is the Wiſdom of the World but, (as our Apoſtle calls it) *Fooliſhneſs with God?*

III. The Third kind is what I call the Wiſdom of Imagination, that is, a Wiſdom that has it's Being in Opinion and Conceit; and by which Men come to think well of themſelves. Now this kind of Wiſdom is a meer Shadow; for even they that

that are Fools pretend to it, as well as they that are of greater Talents; but *neither* are at all the wiſer in truth, for this Opinion of their being ſo: And as it is in it ſelf a Shadow; ſo it chiefly aims and catches at a Shadow, that is, at Vain-Glory and the Admiration of others. Now we may obſerve of this kind of Wiſdom, That it is always attended with one miſchievous Companion, and that is the Affectation of Singularity: They that are Wiſe in their own Conceit, always found their Conceit upon the Knowledge of ſomewhat that is Odd and out of the Way: They hate to think in the common Level; They value not themſelves for knowing what is vulgarly known; but eſteem it their Excellency to ſtart Novelties, and to be the Originals of their own Opinions. From which it follows that this kind of Wiſdom is always a direct Adverſary to Faith: Becauſe Faith is a ſimple Thing, and delivered purely with the Deſign that all ſhould receive it Uniformly; In which caſe the Man that affects Singularity is never pleas'd till he can form ſome New Conception of the matter Revealed, where-

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by he may import that the Reach of his Underſtanding is above the common Meaſure. So that the main Characteriſtick of this Wiſdom is to be ever Oppoſing, or Scrupling, or Refining upon Faith, and pretending to lead that revealed Light, which we all ought to follow with a ready and chearful Submiſſion. From this buſie Itch of pretended wiſe Men, to unſettle Religion, and miſ-interpret the Meſſages of God, and to vend their own Imaginations in place of Divine Oracles, it was that the Prophet *Iſ.* 5. 21. Denounces *Wo againſt them that are Wiſe in their own Eyes, and Prudent in their own Sight.* And my Text is no leſs a warning againſt this kind of Wiſdom from the exemplary Miſchiefs that it has formerly brought upon others, *who profeſſing themſelves to be Wiſe became Fools*; The Truth that is pointed at in theſe Words and from this Example, I ſhall farther evince, and apply in theſe two Propoſitions.

(1.) That Human Wiſdom is a dangerous Guide in Matters of Religion. And,

(2.) That God has vouchſafed Faith as a neceſſary Expedient in order both to make and to keep Men Wiſe.

The firſt Propoſition, *(viz.)* That Human Wiſdom is a dangerous Guide in Matters of Religion; I ſhall evidence by ſhewing, that the greateſt Miſchiefs relating to Religion, that ever yet happen'd to Mankind, have ow'd their Original to this pretended Wiſdom. And I need no more to prove this than the following Inſtances, *viz.*

(1.) That Wiſdom firſt extinguiſh'd the common Worſhip of God and brought Idolatry into the World.

(2.) That Wiſdom firſt waſted Man's Conſcience, and brought Sin into the World.

(3.) That this Wiſdom firſt corrupted Faith and brought all Hereſies into the Church.

As to the firſt Inſtance *(viz.)* That Wiſdom firſt extinguiſh'd the common worſhip of God and brought Idolatry into the World.

It is the expreſs Intimation of the Text. For the Apoſtle is here treating concerning the

the Idolatry of the *Gentiles*; to what extravagance it proceeded and from what Cauſe it ſprung; a Subject which cannot be duly conſider'd without matter of Wonder. *Noah* the Preacher of Righteouſneſs who had warn'd the old World and call'd them to Repentance *in vain*, had at leaſt this Advantage by it, that he came with greater awe to Teach and Inſtruct the New: And he taught them in ſuch a manner, both what they ought to *Believe* and to *Do*; that the Apoſtle ſays of them, *v.* 21. *They all knew both God and his Worſhip*; tho' it was a Knowledge they liked not to retain; but inſtead of that as *v.* 23. *They changed the Glory of the Incorruptible God, into the Image of corruptible Man, and to Birds, and fourfooted Beaſts, and creeping Things.* And this Corruption of Faith and Worſhip together came on ſo faſt, that the ſame *Noah* who had ſeen the Funerals of the old World, for their *No* Religion; ſaw likewiſe in his own days the new World overſpread with a *Falſe* Religion, more Abſurd and Irrational than *None*. Now the Text tells us expreſly that this State of things as ſtrange and groſs as it was, was introduced under

the pretences of Wiſdom, *Profeſſing to be Wiſe they became Fools*; And then as an Inſtance of this it is added, *They changed the Glory of the Incorruptible God, into the Image of Corruptible Man, and to Birds, and fourfooted Beaſts, and creeping Things:* From which it appears that their bringing in of Idolatry, altho' it was the Proof of their Folly, yet it was the Project of their Wiſdom.

It was the Wiſe amongſt them that form'd the Deſign, and addreſt to the Multitude with a grave appearance, and prevail'd (as we may conceive) by ſome ſuch Form of Arguing as this. "We are all a-"ware, ye Sons of *Noah*, that Religi-"on is our Chief Concern, and therefore "it well becomes us to improve and ad-"vance That as much as poſſible: And al-"tho' we have receiv'd Appointments from "God for the Worſhip that he requires, "yet if theſe appointments may be alter'd "for his greater Glory, who doubts but "it will be a commendable Piety ſo to alter "them? Now our Father *Noah* has inſtitu-"ted us in a Religion, which in truth is "too Simple, and too Unaffecting; It directs

"us

" us to worſhip God abſtractedly from all
" Senſe, and under a confus'd Notion;
" under the formality of Attributes, as
" Power, Goodneſs, Juſtice, Wiſdom,
" Eternity, and the like; an Idea which
" we neither ſufficiently reach, nor does
" that ſufficiently reach our Affections:
" whereas in all Reaſon we ought to
" worſhip God more pompouſly, and
" more extenſively too, than in his own
" Eſſence. We ought not only to adore
" his Perſonal Attributes, but likewiſe all
" the Emanations of them, and all thoſe
" Creatures by whom they are eminently
" repreſented; this will ſtir up and quicken
" and direct our Devotion. Nor let any ſay
" that this Method will derogate from the
" Honour of the Creator; certainly it is moſt
" expreſſive of *his* Honour, when we ac-
" knowledge, that not only Himſelf but
" even his *Creatures* are Adorable. We
" ought therefore (if we will be Wiſe)
" to worſhip the Hoſt of Heaven; or ra-
" ther to worſhip *God through them*, becauſe
" they are eminent Repreſentations of his
" Glory and Eternity: We ought to wor-
" ſhip the Elements becauſe they repre-
" ſent

" ſent his Benign, and Suſtaining and ubi-
" quitary Preſence: We ought to wor-
" ſhip the Ox and the Sheep, and what-
" ever Creatures are moſt beneficial, be-
" cauſe they are the Symbols of his Love
" and Goodneſs: And with no leſs Reaſon,
" the Serpent, the Crocodile and other
" noxious Animals, becauſe they are the
" Symbols of his awful Anger. Thus it is
" that we ſhall worſhip him more inten-
" ſly, and *feel* and be affected with our
" Worſhip.

Now to Men diſpos'd with a Deſire to be wiſe in Religion above what was preſcrib'd, there is no doubt but ſuch Arguments as theſe would ſoon ſeem wiſe and weighty enough, to enforce their Deſign. But there was another part of Idolatry which obtain'd firſt, and ſpread fartheſt, that Wiſdom had yet more moving Pretences to eſtabliſh it upon. The firſt Fruits of Idolatry was offered up to Men; as we learn in this *Chap.* from the *Verſe* following, and more at large from *Wiſd.* 14. where we are told that Princes were worſhipp'd; whether Preſent, in their Perſons; or Diſtant, by their Statues and Pictures;

And

And then that Men Inferiour to Princes, but emenient in their Generation for any beneficent or obliging Qualities, were worſhipped after their Death. As for the worſhip of Princes we have no reaſon to doubt but it was as high and as early as *Nimrod* himſelf: *Belus* and *Jupiter*, Names by which he was known in other Regions, import no leſs than his Deification: So that tho' he fail'd in building his Tower to Heaven; which was a haughty attempt, that God thought fit to check and repreſs; yet he fail'd not to build up himſelf to to Heaven in the Eſtimation of his Admirers; which was a Judgment that God thought fit to permit upon thoſe that ſo boldly ſought it.

As for the Deifying of Princes, Wiſdom ſuggeſted that They were the Repreſentatives of God's Power upon Earth; to which Character worſhip was reaſonably due: And not only ſo, but becauſe ſuch an Adoration would beſt conduce to the good Government of the World, foraſmuch as it added a new Obligation to Peace and Submiſſion; and made it of Religious, as well as Civil Importance.

As

As for the Worſhiping of thoſe among the Dead, who had been famous in their Generation (ſuch as former Ages vulgarly ſtiled Heroes, and Modern the Beatify'd, or the Saints) Wiſdom had abundance to alledge for this eſtabliſhment. As

(1.) That ſuch an Honour beſtow'd upon the Vertuous was but a proper Incitement to others to imitate the ſame Vertue.

(2.) That to Honour thoſe that were eminent in ſuch a manner, was chiefly to honour God, whoſe diſtinguiſhing Communications made them ſo.

(3.) That to Addreſs and Supplicate to ſuch as Mediators, was a more Modeſt and Reverential Addreſs to God, than if we applyed immediately to himſelf.

(4.) That by applying to thoſe who had been ſo nearly touched with our Infirmities, and our Sins themſelves not excepted, we were ſure to find the more Compaſſionate and tender Advocates. I doubt not but Men in that Age were qualified to argue for their Humours as well as they can now; and we know that Wiſdom has carried this point in the Church of *Rome*, e-

ven at this day, this day of *Meridian*, that is of Goſpel-Light.

Thus *Wiſdom brought Idolatry into the World.*

The ſecond Inſtance I propoſed to evince it a dangerous Guide in Matters of Religion, was this: That Wiſdom (or let me indifferently call it Reaſon, a Name more in vogue and more uſed in reference to the preſent Subject, but it means purely the ſame thing; I ſay) It was Wiſdom or Reaſon that firſt waſted Man's Conſcience, and brought Sin into the World.

There has been a time when Human Wiſdom or Reaſon had a fairer pretence to Conduct than ever it will have again. In *Paradiſe* where it was without the Oppoſition of Appetite, without the Byaſs of Prejudice, without the Cloud of Perturbations, who can think but that it had *then* more Power and Freedom to conduct wiſely, than ever it could pretend to *ſince?* But therefore if it failed then in point of Conduct; this muſt needs paſs for an Argument to abate ſome of that Veneration, which the Opinionative are willing ſhould be aſcrib'd to it, under this State of ſo

unhappy a Change; Let us then consider the Scene of things as it lay at that time.

God then charged our first Parents not to eat of the Tree in the midst of the Garden; binding his Charge with this Sanction, That they should dye when they did it: Now at that time there was not any φρόνημα σαρκὸς, *No Law of the Members warring against the Law of the Mind*; no Rebellion of Appetite against the Dictates of Understanding: To suppose there *was*, would be to suppose our first Parents faln even before the Fall, and to have been *made* under the same Disorder, that their Posterity now complains of. And accordingly we find in holy Scripture that the Sin of our first Parents in that case is distinguished from those of all their Off-spring: For whereas other Mens Sins are generally called ἐπιθυμίαι Lusts; we may observe that *their* Sin is always called ἀπάτη, Deception: The Apostle calls it so no less than thrice ἀπάτη, that is, a Deception or Imposture that they sufferd to pass upon their Understanding: Whereof we may take an Illustration from a Scriptural Passage, 1 *Kings* 13. where we find a young Prophet of *Judah*

dah ſent to denounce God's Judgments againſt *Jeroboam* in *Bethel*; who withal received a Command that he *ſhould neither Eat nor Drink in that Place.* Now it no way appears that the violence of this young Prophet's Appetite did raiſe in him any deſire to diſobey this Command; on the contrary, he was upon his return reſolvedly and contentedly, without either Eating or Drinking; ſo that 'tis plain his Appetite did not conſtrain him to tranſgreſs: But an old Prophet of the Place (moved probably with Envy that the Honour of this Meſſage had been conferr'd on a Prophet of *Judah*, and not on himſelf) addreſſes to him with an Impoſture; telling him that God did reverſe his former Order, and did now give him Liberty to Eat and Drink in *Bethel:* As conſequently he did, and thereupon received the Reward that is due to him who diſobeys a certain Command, for the ſake of an uncertain Suggeſtion. With the like Impoſture and Fiction it was that the old Serpent addreſs'd himſelf to our firſt Parents; implying by the Tendency of all his Diſcourſe that God had either diſſembled his real Will in his for-

mer Order, or at leaſt that he had now Revers'd it; So that now they ſhould not Dye, but on the contrary receive great advantage from the Eating of the Fruit: And hereupon they proceeded to Eat it, being drawn aſide to do ſo, not from the violence of Appetite, but from the temerity of Reaſon; which ſuffered them to believe an uncertain Suggeſtion, in oppoſition to a certain Command. From which I obſerve that it was Reaſon not Appetite, that made the firſt falſe Step in Nature, and withal open'd an inlet to the ſucceeding violence of the Paſſions. And how little cauſe have we then to lay ſuch a ſtreſs upon that Faculty; *or* to be ſo fond of its Guidance? For if Reaſon betrayed in the moſt perfect State, how much more eaſily will it do ſo Now; if ever it be permitted to argue againſt the obvious Senſe of what has been Revealed?

And if Wiſdom were thus Originally the Parent of Sin; we may leſs wonder that in after Ages it has become ſo indulgent a Nurſe to it; as we may prove it to have been by *one* Inſtance I ſhall offer; from which it will appear that this pretenſion

to

to Wiſdom or Reaſon has given a greater blow to Vertue, and ſettled the Empire of Sin upon a firmer Eſtabliſhment in the Chriſtian World, than either Ignorance or natural Pravity was ever able to do in the Heathen. For Example;

When the State of a general Idolatry (but now mention'd) had brought Men to deſert God, and God in Juſtice to deſert them to the miſchief of their Option; when in conſequence to this affected Blindneſs, Men in moſt caſes came to be at a doubt what it was to do well; and more uncertain of what advantage it would be to do ſo: One would have thought that Sin *Then*, if ever, was like to get the Field; and that the Kingdom of Satan had been ſettled without Reluctancy: And yet it was not ſo: The Heathens ſtill found an Invincible Check from the Bodings of their Conſcience, and the Apprehenſions thereupon that there was to be a future Reckoning: And by this very Bridle many amongſt them liv'd under great Reſtraint, and were Men of Virtue; and they that were otherwiſe could not eſcape Remorſe and Affrightment for their Guilt.

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The Wiſdom of the World to arm it ſelf againſt theſe Fears, did, (1.) (from Countenance of the palpable Miſtake concerning the Gods then in Worſhip) *ſtart* the Opinion, *That there was no God at all.*

But the Notion of Atheiſm did ſeem ſo Monſtrous and Irrational, that few would receive it; and They who profeſs'd it were lookt upon as not believing themſelves; but as ſpeaking rather what they wiſh'd, than what they thought. And of this the *Pſalmiſt* gives us Notice, *Pſal.* 14. 1.

Others (propoſing to offer leſs Violence to the common Conceptions of Mankind) taught That *indeed there were Gods; but that they were Regardleſs of Human Affairs; and that ſuch a State of Incurioufneſs in them was neceſſary to their own Happineſs and Quiet:* But neither could this Notion work far; becauſe it ſeem'd to the Generality, as abſurd and more affronting to the Divine Nature, to believe that God was Indifferent and Regardleſs, than to believe there was no God at all. And of this Doctrine the *Pſalmiſt* gives us Intimation, *Pſal.* 94. 7.

A Third, and that the ſtrongeſt Barrier againſt ſuch ill Bodings, was drawn from the Philoſophy of our Conſtitution, *whereby the Soul was repreſented as neceſſarily Mortal as the Body, and thereupon ſecure againſt all future Accounts.* Of which Doctrine *Solomon* gives us a large Notice, *Wiſdom*, chap. 2.

Perhaps I had been more in the Mode, had I mention'd *Greece* for the School of theſe Doctrines, and *Diagoras*, *Protagoras*, and *Epicurus* for the Doctors: But I am ſenſible what great Diſreſpect has been ſhewn to the Holy Scriptures, by this Affectation. In which Scriptures (during the Period they pretend to, which is much above half of that Time the World has hitherto laſted) we meet with the beſt Account of all things even Civil as well as Sacred. And how abſurd would it be for me, in this particular Matter, to aſcribe the *Fortuitous Being*, and the *Periſhable State of the Soul*, and the *Regardleſneſs of the Deity*, to *Epicurus*; when we find theſe Notions recorded in Holy Writ, as eſpous'd long before *Greece* had ever opened a School to any of this vain Philoſophy?

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But, these Circumstantials set aside, my main Point was to shew, That these several Arguments had not power to shelter the Heathen World from frightful apprehensions concerning the future ill consequences of Sin: They still doubted that forasmuch as their Souls had a Notion of Eternity, they had likewise an Essential Relation to Eternity; And therefore they thought that their own inward Hopes and Fears spoke better Sense about the issues of such a Duration, than they could meet with from the Reasonings of those that pretended to be wiser. And here the Heathens were forc'd to stop; and tho' their Wit and Will were heartily joyn'd to serve the cause of Vice as far as they could, yet they could never remove this awful Barrier. Whereas, in a more Illuminated time, (as we must allow that of the Gospel to be;) The most Illuminated of that time (as they would have us allow the *Socinians* to be) have with great Ostentation, and as great Applause of their Wisdom, done the cause of Vice more effectual Service, than ever could be done it before.

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Abating the Outrage they have done the Scripture, (about which they are not very Sollicitous) they have made their Hypotheſis Plauſible as well as Grateful: They ſpeak reſpectfully of God; and not diſreſpectfully of the Soul; They determine not *How*, or of *What* it is made; but they determine that, as it is a Creature of Gods, ſo it is either Mortal or Immortal at his diſcretion: And thereupon to reward the Pious with Eternal Happineſs, is what well ſuits with Gods Goodneſs and Benignity: But it would not do ſo, to puniſh the Sinful with Eternal Torments: *That* could neither ſuit with Goodneſs nor Juſtice it ſelf: Becauſe that between Temporal Guilt and Eternal Puniſhment, there is no Proportion: And therefore all that the ſinful Soul may fear from God, is a Declaration of its Incapacity for Heaven, and a Sentence for its extinction and loſs of Being.

Never ſuch an *Amulet* as this was offer'd to quiet all the bodings of Conſcience; Never did Sin ſleep upon ſo ſoft a Pillow as is made up of this Hypotheſis; which carries careleſs Souls, beyond all

former Hope, ev'n into the Lap of their own Wiſh; which is, *Never to be acquainted with Eternity, ſo they may undiſturbedly enjoy their preſent Inclinations.*

Juvenal the Poet ſpeaking of that Notion that the Heathens had form'd of a future State, That there was a Boat, and a Ferryman, and a black Lake, and frightful Frogs in it, which careleſs Souls were to paſs over to a miſerable Abode; Cries out ---- *Quis puer hoc credat? i. e.* (*In Hypotheſi*) in it's circumſtantial Dreſs, *It were Childiſh to believe this* ---- But adds (*in Theſi*) *At tu vera puta* ---: Do thou who ever thou art, believe *This*, at leaſt ſomething *like this*, to be true.

And who can ſay but *Juvenal* was a wiſe Man in this Reflection? But then is it not ſurprizingly ſtrange that a more elevated Wiſdom ſhould ſet it ſelf to prove, That nothing like This ought to be believ'd? And that all fears of Futurity are Groundleſs, except that of being made Inſenſible? It was Wiſdom to believe Hell Torments in thoſe that neither knew God nor his Revelation; And can it be Wiſdom too, for any not to believe Hell Torments, who are ſure that

that God has revealed them? And is it not farther ſurprizingly ſtrange, that thoſe Men who pretend their *Zeal for Morality* is above that of all others, ſhould open ſuch a Sluice to the Flood of Immorality? Alas! what a Contradictory thing is profeſſed Wiſdom, when once it affects to lead in Matters of Faith? It is much more both abſurd and miſchievous than confeſſed Folly.

Thus much for the *ſecond* Charge of Wiſdom, (*viz.*) That it brought Sin into the World.

The laſt I propoſed to warn us againſt fondneſs for its Guidance is This, (*viz.*) That it firſt corrupted Faith, and brought all Hereſies into the Church.

Suitably to this --- It is commonly obſerved of that ſect of Men, who in the earlieſt days of Chriſtianity invented ſo many various Corruptions of Faith, that they hardly left room for the Invention of ſubſequent Ages to find out any New; That they affected for a diſtinguiſhing Name to be call'd *Gnoſtici*, *i. e.* the *Knowers*, or ſuch as underſtood more than their Neighbours. And we cannot doubt but that our Apoſtle had an Eye to ſome of theſe, and their

wild Opinions, as well as the Principle that occaſion'd them, 1 *Tim.* 6. 20. where charging *Timothy* to ſtand firm in the Faith, and to keep that *Depoſitum*, *i. e.* that Scheme of Chriſtian Doctrine which had been deliver'd, preſcribes to him this Means as neceſſary to his purpoſe (*viz.*) *That he ſhould avoid the oppoſition* τ῀ γνώσεως *of Science* (or Wiſdom) *falſly ſo call'd; which ſome profeſſing have erred concerning the Faith:* We know the Scripture meddles not with the Impeachment of any *Science*, or with *calling it falſe*, but barely as it intrenches upon Faith, and oppoſes that which it ought to follow: And therefore this *Science* is here ſpecifi'd by it's *Oppoſition*, *i. e.* it's Inclination to oppoſe the Faith commonly receiv'd; accounting it a reſtraint (as I have intimated already) to think or believe with the Vulgar.

And to evidence that this *Kind of Science* did make *Men erre concerning the Faith*, as the Text alledgeth; Let us but conſider thoſe Hereſies that are mentioned in Scripture as firſt obtaining in the Church, and we ſhall ſoon ſee how they took their Riſe,

at

at leaſt all their Pretence from this very Principle.

Some there were (we know) who erred concerning the *Reſurrection*, *ſaying it was already paſt*; and no doubt but it was a ſtart of Wiſdom and Affectation of extraordinary Reach that firſt form'd this into a Hereſie. For Example;

Some of the Heathen Philoſophers who were grown to dreſs up their Doctrines for Oſtentation, and not ſo much to inſtruct, as to ſurprize and make themſelves admired; Had pronounc'd of Vertue, That it was a ſufficient Reward to it ſelf; and that a good Man was Happy enough in being Good, and leading a Life according to Reaſon, altho' there were no Expectations of a future Recompenſe. Whereupon ſome Chriſtian Proſelytes pleaſing themſelves with the vain Glory of this Notion, adopted it into Chriſtianity, and held that it was a Poor and Mercenary thing to practiſe Godlineſs for the Expectation of another World; And that therefore altho' God had in the Goſpel declared a Reſurrection, yet this Reſurrection was to be underſtood in a Figurative and Moral Senſe,

Senſe, *i. e.* to import no more than a riſing from the State of Sin to the State of Righteouſneſs: And that the Chriſtian Vertue would *then* be more glorious, and more worthy of God, when it ſhall appear that he obeys for *God's ſake*, rather than for *his own?* Thus thoſe of the *Anti-Anaſtaſie* were pleaſed by dint of Wiſdom to void the Promiſes of Heaven; which wild Concluſion we may wonder at the leſs, ſince the wiſe *Socinians* have at this day with no leſs contradiction to Scripture been pleaſed to void the Threatnings of Hell.

We are told of another Sect in that Age, who erred concerning the Condition of the Goſpel-Covenant; Reſting upon a naked Faith as the entire Qualification; and *thereby voiding the Law*, vilifying Obedience, and turning the Grace of God into Wantonneſs. One would not think indeed that Wiſdom could have much of pretence towards this Project, and yet it had: The *Antinomians* alledg'd, That whereas it was the peculiar Glory of God to be infinitely Merciful; and the Glory of Chriſt's Satisfaction to be infinitely Valuable; The more Guilt Men had, the more abundant op-

opportunity they gave to God to diſcover the Riches of his Pardon; and the more Men were in Debt, the greater appeared to be both the Value of their Ranſom, and the Credit of their Redeemer.

No doubt but this Arguing ſeemed Wiſe to them that uſed it; And at leaſt we have this to alledge for the ſupport of its pretence, That the *Antinomians* were not more extravagant in aſſerting that Chriſt's Satisfaction was ſufficient to ſave without the care of Good Living, than the *Socinians* are in aſſerting that the Care of Good Living is ſufficient to ſave without the Satisfaction of Chriſt: For ſo their Scheme runs;

That Chriſt neither made nor intended any Satisfaction at all; and yet every Impartial Man may convince himſelf, That it is not more evident in Scripture, That God requires us to be Holy, than that Chriſt ſhed his Blood for our Redemption; Redemption I ſay, not in the Exemplary, but in the Expiatory Senſe.

We have another Maſs of Heretical Corruption ſpoken of by our Apoſtle, 2 *Theſſ.* 2. not indeed as then reigning, but rather

rather foretold as that it ſhould reign, through occaſion of a *Certain Man of Sin ſitting as God in the Temple of God:* Even The Papiſts allowing that the Scene of this grand Corruption of Faith is *Rome*; and we may without prejudice affirm it to be Popery it ſelf. Now to ſee how *Wiſdom* has contributed to bring this Maſs of abuſes into that Church, Let us but conſider this ſingle One; which we may look upon as the moſt Characteriſtical (*viz.*) The ſetting up of a Human Infallible Guide: Whereby every Biſhop of that See, ſeems to effect the pretence of *Montanus*, and would be held for a Holy Ghoſt Incarnate; And what can come nearer to *one ſitting as God in the Temple of God?*

What hand *Wiſdom* had in hatching this Conceit we may learn from the wiſeſt of that Communion, when they alledge that the Belief of *This* is the ſure and onely Method to end all Controverſies, and eſtabliſh that Peace and Union which all good Chriſtians deſire. And as for the Means made uſe of to bring this Conceit into Credit, they have carried in them the moſt pompous Semblance of Wiſdom Imaginable: While

While its particular Champions, the *Jeſuits*, (the Artificial *Petavius* and others) have contriv'd with elaborate Pains and Study, *to weaken the Authority of the Scriptures*, as being of Uncertain Interpretation, and of Uncertain Reception; and *to puzzle the Senſe of all the diſtinguiſhing Articles of Chriſtianity*; by alledging the Oppoſition of Hereticks, and the difference of Conciliary Decrees; and by raking up all the Diſſonancies of Expreſſions that are to be met with in the Writings of the Ancients.

As indeed how can the ſame Truth be delivered without Diſſonancies of Expreſſion, ſuppoſing it to be delivered upon different Occaſions, and for different Reſpects? Let the Expreſſions of St. *Paul* and St. *James* upon the Article of *Juſtification* paſs for an Inſtance of Appeal.

In the mean time the *Wiſdom* of the Church of *Rome* thought fit to do all this Inſidiouſly, and with purpoſe to Deceive, ſo they might ſerve this Important End, (*viz.*) To make Chriſtians believe that they muſt needs be bewildred while they were under ſuch an unſtable Conduct

as that of the Scriptures, Councils and Fathers; and therefore to conclude themſelves obliged to repair to the ſtanding Infallible Guide.

Ask the *Socinians* themſelves Whether there were not admirable Wiſdom in this Contrivance: For even they themſelves make uſe of the ſame Means, and borrow their boaſted Armes of Learning from the Jeſuit's Shop; not indeed to the ſame End, in Form; but to the ſame, in Miſchief; Not to eſtabliſh the Pope for an Infallible Guide; but to eſtabliſh Reaſon for an Infallible Guide; which in effect is to ſet up as many Popes in the World, as there are Men of an aſſuming Imagination.

What I have ſaid hitherto has been in order to evince the Truth of my firſt Propoſition, (*viz.*) *That Wiſdom is a dangerous Guide in Matters of Religion.*

I offer'd a Second, (*viz.*) *That God has vouchſafed Faith as a neceſſary Expedient both to make and to keep Men Wiſe:* Which I reſerve for the Subject of another Diſcourſe.

SER-

SERMON II.

ROM. i. 22.

Profeſſing themſelves to be Wiſe, they became Fools.

FRom theſe Words conſider'd, together with their Occaſion, I have before inferr'd theſe *Two* Heads of Diſcourſe:

I. That *Human Wiſdom* (or Reaſon) *is a dangerous Guide in Matters of Religion.* And this I have proved already, by ſhewing, How ſtrangely *Wiſdom* has fail'd in all her Conduct about ſuch Matters. The *Second* is,

II. That *God has ordained Faith as a Neceſſary Expedient, both to Make and to Keep Men Wiſe.* The Proof whereof I am now to purſue.

I ſuppoſe there is no Man in the World of what Perſwaſion ſoever, but will be ready to grant, That what God vouchſafes to reveal, muſt be abler to make us Wiſe, than what we can conceive of our ſelves: Nor (in conſequence) will any deny, That Faith to what is Revealed is a Due which we owe not only to God for the Honour of his Truth; but likewiſe to our ſelves, for the ſake of our ſafe Conduct: And therefore there is like to be no Diſpute whether *Faith* (in general) can make Men Wiſe; The Diſpute is only upon this Point, What kind of Faith (in particular) it muſt be that makes Men *Wiſe:* And we ſhall find that the Judgment of Mankind lies under a common Prejudice againſt what is true in reference to this Point. For we may obſerve it to obtain in the World, That the Faith adapted to make a Wiſe Man, muſt be a *Cautious* and *Reſerved* Faith, becauſe all Forwardneſs in Believing expoſes Men to be deceived: And yet in Holy Scripture we are taught clean contrary, That God is only pleaſed with an *Humble and Ready* Faith, and every Abatement of Forwardneſs is a Diminution

of

of its Value. Our Saviour in his Walk to *Emmaus* calls his Diſciples *Fools*, becauſe they were *ſlow of Heart to Believe*. And ſoon after he tells *Thomas*, That the Tardineſs of his Faith had robb'd it of its Bleſſing, For *Bleſſed are they that have not ſeen, and yet have believed.*

And becauſe I am falln upon the mention of this Apoſtle, I will chooſe to inſiſt a little upon his Character; which may ſerve both for an Example and an Illuſtration of the matter I am upon.

Thomas (as far as we may learn by all the mentions made of him in Holy Writ) was a Man *Bold in Reaſoning, and extreamly Nice in Believing:* Which is a Character that by the ſtandard of the preſent Age has Licence to paſs for an Indication of Wiſdom.

Joh. 14. 2, 3, 4. We have a Paſſage of Diſcourſe wherein this Apoſtle was wholly concern'd: There our Saviour ſays very obligingly to thoſe about him: *In my Father's Houſe are many Manſions --- I go to prepare a place for you --- And whither I go you know, and the way you know:* To this obliging Declaration *Thomas* anſwers very peremptorily, *Lord, we know not whither thou goeſt,*

goeſt, and how ſhould we know the Way? We ſee the Anſwer is directly contradicting to that which our Saviour alledged; and yet no doubt but the Apoſtle thought himſelf to have Reaſon on his ſide for making ſuch an Anſwer. Let us imagine what that Reaſon might be: 'Tis poſſible he might form his arguing on this manner.

"Lord, Thou ſayeſt, Thou art going "to thy Father's Houſe to provide Man- "ſions for us: Now we know thy Father's "Houſe, according to natural Generation, "is that of *Joſeph* and *Mary*; in which "many Manſions are not to be had: But "if thou meaneſt a Father by any o- "ther kind of Generation; or any other "Inheritance which thou haſt a Title to "recommend us to: This is what we do "not underſtand; and what we do not "underſtand, it is impoſſible for us to Be- "lieve: And therefore ſay to us ſomething "that we *may* believe; or in the mean time "permit us to be Incredulous, and to ſay, *We know not whither thou goeſt.*

If I have in this Form, Argu'd any thing contrary to the Sentiments of the Apoſtle; I have whereof to Retract in reverence

verence to his ſubſequent better Underſtanding: But I fear I have ſaid nothing that the preſent Age will require me to Apologize for; Becauſe they who ſet up for a leading Genius, pleaſe themſelves to argue in the very ſame Method to juſtifie a like Incredulity. Thus runs the common Argument, "*We cannot believe what we pleaſe;* "*we muſt comprehend both the Matter and its* "*Credibility, or elſe it were Raſh and Fooliſh* "*to believe it.*

Joh. 11. We have another Paſſage wherein *Thomas* was wholly concern'd, There (*verſe* 14.) our Saviour ſays to his Diſciples *Our Friend* Lazarus *is Dead, and I am glad for your ſakes that I was not there, to the intent you may believe:* This we ſee our Saviour urged expreſly for an Encouragment of their Faith; and yet *Thomas* his Reaſoning turned it immediately into an Argument of Diſtruſt: As is apparent from what he ſaid to his Fellow Diſciples upon this Occaſion, (*verſe* 16.) *Let us alſo go, That we may Dye with him:* The Key of his meaning in this Sentence we may take from the Narration in the beginning of the Chapter: Where 'tis ſai'd That our Saviour

viour being then in *Galilee*, upon the News of *Lazarus* his Sickneſs, propoſed to go into *Judea* to viſit him: Whereupon the Diſciples anſwer'd, (*V.* 8.) *Maſter, the Jews of late ſought to Stone thee, and goeſt thou thither again?* Now this Thought made a deep Impreſſion upon the wary Imagination of *Thomas*; and therefore when he ſaw his Maſter reſolved to go; he wound up all into this ſort of *Reaſoning Deſpair*. "*Lazarus* is Dead, and all his Pains and Fears "are over; and better it were for us, if "ours were ſo too: The Jews Malice is "bent upon the Deſtruction of us all; and "if our Maſter could not ſave his princi-"pal Friend from Death; what hopes is "there of his ſaving us? Let us go then "and meet our Doom as patiently as we "can. This is the natural Paraphraſe of what *Thomas* meant by that Sentence, *Let us alſo go that we may Die with him*: And altho' nothing could be more contrary to the Faith he ow'd his Maſter, or more affronting to the importance of what he had then ſaid; yet ſtill he lookt upon this as *ſound Reaſoning*: And indeed it was as ſound as any other Man's is; and brought forth

as

as good Fruits as any other Man's does, when it once takes Licence to *Scruple*, what it ought to believe.

The laſt mention of this Apoſtle is in the Inſtance of the Reſurrection. He had been told that our Saviour was Riſen from the Dead; and the truth of it had been atteſted to him by Evidences beyond Exception: Several Companies who had ſeen him, and converſt with him ſeveral times; to whom he had expos'd the ſight and feeling of his Wounds; to whom he had Expounded the Scriptures concerning himſelf; with whom he had broken the Sacramental Bread; and conferr'd on them the operative Benediction of, *Receive ye the Holy Ghoſt*: All theſe, with all theſe convincing Tokens, had told *Thomas* that Chriſt was Riſen: But yet *Thomas* (in pure Wiſdom) would not believe. *He was alſo called* Didymus, ſays the Text: And I think that Allegation how caſual ſoever it may ſeem, is Argumentative to my purpoſe: (*viz.*) *Thomas* had a *Greek* Name, as well as a *Hebrew* one; which is a probable Argument that he had had a Con-

verſation with the *Greeks*; and perhaps had learnt from them That μήμνησο ἀπιστεῖν *Have a care of being Credulous*, was the grand Advice of one of their Sages; and thereupon he reſolved not to believe without farther Conviction than all this. And no doubt but he conceiv'd *Reaſon* to be on his ſide for all this Behaviour: *Reaſon* ſuggeſted that a wiſe Man ought to be cautious to the utmoſt, leaſt he be impos'd upon: *Reaſon* ſuggeſted that when he had his Choice of ſeveral Matters to believe, he ought to chooſe that for the Matter of his belief which was in it ſelf moſt Credible: Now it was more Credible that ſuch a number of Witneſſes might be *Deceiv'd*; or (as Honeſt as they once were) might be drawn into Confederacy to *Deceive*; Then that *One ſhould riſe from the Dead*: Becauſe *This* was naturally Impoſſible; It could not be done without a Miracle; and wiſe Men will never have recourſe to Miracles, ſo long as nature may ſolve the Appearance.

Now ſuppoſe that *Thomas* proceeded Th us far with Reaſon on his ſide; and acted like a *Wiſe* that is to ſay, a *Cautious* Man

Man (as for ought I ſee, the ſtandard of many Men's Judgments at this day will allow him to have acted:) Yet let me obſerve one thing more from his Example, and that is This (*viz.*) *That Human Reaſon is very ſubject to be partially Blind:* For while it is Hunting after thoſe Arguments that make for its preſent Purpoſe, it never takes notice of thoſe that make more ſtrongly againſt it.

As for Inſtance: When *Thomas* refus'd to admit Conviction from the Senſe and Atteſtation of ſo many credible Witneſſes; Yet at the ſame time he declared it fit to be determin'd by the Verdict of his *Own Senſe:* Where he never conſider'd what a haughty Piece of Injuſtice it was to imply that his own ſingle Senſe was leſs Fallible, then the joynt Experience of ſuch a Number. Again, while he imagin'd it poſſible that ſo many good Men ſhould conſpire to deceive him; he never conſider'd how many Arguments there were to prove that this Cenſure of his was Abſurd, as well as Uncharitable: For had he not Converſt now three Years under the Conviction of all ſorts of Mira-

cles, and could he not extend his Faith to believe that One more might be done? After he had ſeen his Lord raiſe more than One from the Dead; could he not think it poſſible that he himſelf might be rais'd by the ſame Power? Nay (what was yet more culpable than all the reſt) after he had heard his Lord publickly averring before hand, that *Thus it muſt be, and that he ſhould Riſe again the Third Day*; He never conſider'd that to diſtruſt the Event after ſuch a prediction of ſuch a Perſon, as had ſufficiently prov'd himſelf able to do, whatever he thought fit to be done, was a diſtruſt abſolutely Irreligious and Prophane. And yet thns it was --- Thus the wiſe Pretences of Incredulity could betray *Thomas* to be Irreverent, Uncharitable, Abſurd and Irreligious, and all under the colour of being Reaſonable. Theſe extravagant Effects *Niceneſs* in believing could produce in him; And who can Queſtion but that they are likely to produce the ſame in any one elſe?

This ſingle Example ſerves to inform us, into what a *Labyrinth* Reaſon will lead Men, when once it declines the Conduct of

of an humble and ready Faith; and upon This my Aſſertion is founded that ſuch a Faith is our only Guide unto Wiſdom.

But I ſhall proceed to evidence the ſame by a black Cloud of Inſtances.

I doubt not but they who ſcruple or oppoſe or depart from the Common Faith at this day, will readily allow, That in whatever they except againſt the Received Form, they do it from this ſame principle of Wiſdom and Caution, *(viz.)* Leſt they ſhould be impos'd upon by the Miſtakes of others; and therefore they reſolve to adhere to ſome Senſe of their own, which they look upon as more Rational and leſs obnoxious to Abſurdity or Deceiving. And there are *Two* Parties of Men who have made themſelves very notorious for this Pretence.

(1.) The *Firſt* is of Thoſe who will not allow any *Revelation*, *i.e.* Not any Scripture dictated from God.

(2.) And the *Second* is of thoſe who will not admit the received Interpretation of that Scripture, which they allow to have been Revealed.

Now

Now it may be made appear from the Inſtances of theſe very Parties; *That no Man ever departed from the Common Faith upon pretence of avoiding any Abſurdities therein ſuppoſed; but that he ran himſelf upon the neceſſity of believing greater Abſurdities, than any he pretended to avoid.*

I. The firſt Party conſiſts of Thoſe who deny all Revelation; who profeſs a Religion of Nature's Teaching, but none that God has taught: Who diſtinguiſh themſelves by the name of Deiſts, becauſe they own a God, but barely a God; and not thoſe diſpenſations which are moſt ſuitable to the Goodneſs of the God they own: Of which Revelation is the Cheif.

Now however the Wiſdom of ſuch Men may pleaſe it ſelf with this cautious Inffidelity, which they pretend to take up as a Guard againſt Impoſture; Yet would it not be wiſer for every Man to ſuſpect his particular Reaſon when he does, or may, obſerve it to claſh with the common Reaſon of Mankind? And certainly to deny Revelation is a Conceit that claſhes with the Univerſal Reaſon and Perſwaſion of Mankind

kind in all Ages of the World. For there is nothing wherein Men have conſented more freely (next to the Being of a God) than in this Belief That it is ſuitable to the Goodneſs of God to hold a Correſpondence and Commerce with Men, and to exert himſelf in a Providence that extends as well to the Conduct of Actions, as to the diſpoſal of Events; that is, a Providence for Man's better Part, as well as for his Worſe.

So long as Men continu'd in the Worſhip of the true God, They had this Notion riveted upon their Minds by the vouchſafement of frequent Meſſages, and of ſuch Oracular Directions, as demonſtrated themſelves to come from God: And when Men departed from the true Worſhip, yet they could not depart from this rooted Expectation: Inſomuch that the Devil could not maintain the Reputation of his Worſhip among them without a pretence to the ſame Commerce. And this was the Original of all the Heathen Oracles: Which altho' *they* were Deluſory, yet they afford an Evidence that there were others True

and

and Divine, and that Mankind always *hoped* for ſuch from the God they Worſhipp'd.

The Deiſt will ſubmit his Faith to a Heathen Evidence, tho' he will not to a Chriſtian; And therefore he will not deny theſe Oracles to have been, and to have been frequent among the *Gentiles:* He readily grants that *Socrates* (which he is willing to prefer above Chriſt and his Apoſtles) got his Reputation of being counted the wiſeſt Man of his Country, from the Reſponſe of an Oracle: (In which Reſponſe, by the way, we muſt preſume either that God over-rul'd the Voice of the evil Spirit (as he did in *Balaam's* Caſe) and ſo *forc'd* him to ſpeak on Virtue's ſide; Or elſe that the Devil found himſelf neceſſitated ſometimes to do ſo, in Reverence to Men's Conſciences; over whom he was not always able to maintain his awe without ſome ſemblance of *approving Virtue.*) Now if ſuch Oracles *were*; Let any one likewiſe tell us how they came to ceaſe all together, as tis own'd they did, at the Time of the Revelation by our Lord Jeſus: How came they thus to ceaſe on a ſudden,

ſudden, if it were not from the deſign of Providence to make that event give Teſtimony both to Jeſus and his Revelation: To Jeſus, that he was one who had Power over the Devil; and to his Revelation, That it was Plenary and Conſummate, ſo that for the future Men needed not ſeek any farther to learn *what is the full and acceptable and perfect Will of God.*

When the Deiſt confirms his prejudice againſt the Chriſtian Revelation from this Argument, *That all Religions do equally pretend to the ſame Original, that is, to come from God:* I allow that Reaſon has *Here* a proper Province; Let it therefore be call'd in: Let Reaſon enquire, and then Judge, and ſay whether there is any other Religion ſo worthy of God as the Chriſtian is? Whether there is any whoſe Doctrines are ſo convincing: And whoſe Miracles are ſo Demonſtrative: Nay, whether ever there was any thing of Human Faith, that came ſo atteſted as our Religion does, and fail'd of Belief in the World: And what ſingular Perverſneſs is it then that this ſhould not be believed? Let any one ſay eſpecially, How the Goſpel Truth, that aſſerted

it ſelf ſo effectually in its beginning, at that time when any poſſibility of fraud could beſt have been diſcover'd, after it had aſſerted it ſelf againſt all the Malice of Satan, and the Oppoſition of all Worldly Powers; can after 1600 Years be given up as a Fiction, or be affected with any ſuch diſcredit, from the perfidiouſneſs of a company of bold and looſe and weak Deſerters? Let any one reflect upon theſe Conſiderations, and he ſhall find that the Deiſts Opinion runs them upon a multitude of Abſurdities; beſides all the fatal miſchief of it's unconſidered Conſequences.

The ſeveral Religions received among the *Gentiles*, were ſo full of groſs Superſtitions, and palpable Errors, that many particular Men among thoſe *Gentiles*, of ſounder Judgments and better Spirits than the common, were ſcandalized at their Religions and had them in Contempt: So that, altho' for Decency's ſake and Submiſſion to the Laws, they gave occaſional countenance to the vulgar Rites of Worſhip, Yet their private Religion conſiſted in forming to themſelves a more rational Notion of God, abſtracted from all the received Idols; And the

the Worſhip they deemed moſt ſuitable to ſuch a God, was placed in following Reaſon, and reverencing their Conſciences, and cultivating their Minds in the ſtudy of Knowledge and Practice of Virtue: And theſe were ſuch as among the *Greeks* they firſt call'd Philoſophers. They whom we modernly call Deiſts, are the *Apes* of thoſe Philoſophers; and that they may be thought like them, ſet up to treat *Chriſtian* Religion with the ſame Contempt as *thoſe* did the *Vulgar Heathen*. But as it is obſerv'd of the Ape, that altho' of all Creatures it moſt reſembles Man, yet it is the ugliеſt of all Creatures, becauſe the Honour of that reſemblance is abated by many ridiculous Deficiencies; So we may ſay of the Deiſts, that they are the moſt abſurd and fooliſh of Men; becauſe they *Ape* the wiſe under ſuch great difference of Circumſtances, and ſuch great deficiencies of Purpoſe.

For the Philoſophers were ſuch as in the Night of *Gentile* Darkneſs, ſet up their Candle (ſo *Solomon* calls *the Spirit of Man, The Candle of the Lord*); they ſtrictly attended the improvement of their Minds, and ſo ſet up their Candle, and walked commen-

dably by the Light of it: Now these Men were truly Wise, none under their Circumstances could possibly be Wiser. But on the contrary the Deists are such, as at Noon-Day shut up their Windows, and keep out the Sun; and then set up their Candle, and say that That is the most agreeable Light, and the best Guide to their houshold Business. Now what can be alledg'd for the Wisdom of These? There have been some carried away with this phantastical and mistaken Admiration of the Philosophers Religion in former times of Christianity; but they were rare as Monsters, and so accounted of: But they never grew Numerous and in heart till of late, since they took their Growth and Apology from the Conduct of the *Socinians*; The second Party I proposed to instance in.

II. The Conduct of the *Socinians* was this; They own'd the Scriptures to be the Word of God, but would not abide by the received Interpretation of that Word; nor admit that Explication of the principal Doctrines therein contain'd, which had been delivered down by the Universal Church;

Church; but inſtead of this, uſurped a Liberty of Interpreting all a-new at their own diſcretion, and to make them ſpeak their own prejudicated Senſe. In conformity to this Deſign, *Socinus*, after he had form'd his new Scheme of Divinity, to make it paſs upon the World with all the Advantage he could, Introduces his Expoſition upon St. *John*, with this Sentence, *Multa ſunt profecto in quibus Chriſtianus orbis adhuc cæcutit, & fortaſſe plura quam quis vel credere, vel etiam cogitare poſſit*, i. e. *There are undoubtedly many Truths, and perhaps more than any one can either believe or imagine, in reſpect of which the whole Chriſtian World has been hitherto quite Blind and Ignorant:* Which Sentence (and ſeveral ſuch like accompanying it) makes it apear, That never any Man more fill'd up each Member of that Character which our Saviour gives of the Phariſee, (*viz.*) *Of thinking well of himſelf and deſpiſing others*, than *Socinus* did. For it implies that altho' the Scriptures were the Oracles of God, yet they reſembled thoſe of the *Gentiles* in this; That they were Dark and of a doubtful Senſe, and of no authoritative Interpretation, and that hitherto

therto they had been quite miſtaken, till ſuch time as this new Illumination had been vouchſafed to himſelf. Now ſince this Imagination paſt upon *Socinus* from his Caution of being impos'd upon by the former Interpreters of Scripture: Let us conſider how palpably he muſt have impos'd upon himſelf, before this Imagination could take place.

If he believed it himſelf, can any one elſe in Reaſon believe, That the whole Chriſtian World had been Blind down to his days, and Ignorant in the moſt important Truths, which it was reſerved for his honour to Reveal; So that the *Light of the Word* had not yet enlightned Mankind, till his Comments had diſpell'd the Cloud that lay upon it? Can any one believe with Reaſon, that all the Aſſertors of our Religion in the Primitive Ages, Men Holy, Studious, Learned, Signalized and Diſtinguiſh'd with all the Gifts of God, both Gracious and Miraculous; had yet none of that *Knowledge of the Mind of God*, as might now be learnt at the feet of *Socinus*? Can it appear agreeable to the Providence of God, and his good Will for Human Salvation,

vation, after he had required Faith to pleaſe him as well as Obedience; and that, Faith in Doctrines as well as in Promiſes; yet to let 15 Centuries paſs without making it commonly known what it was he required Men to believe? Can it appear conſiſtent with God's Promiſe to his Church, That his Spirit ſhould lead them into all Truth, and yet for ſuch a Tract of time the whole multitude of Chriſtians ſhould account it impious to believe That, which now the *Poliſh* Catechiſm ſays, *It is damnable not to believe, when it is propos'd:* So that if Chriſtians were ſaved before that time in the Common Faith, it was from the Apology of their Ignorance; as their Ignorance was, becauſe they had not a *Socinus* to inſtruct them.

Say rather why the Deiſts may not as colourably *Reject* the Scriptures, as the *Socinians Own* them, with ſo many contradictions to God's Truth and Goodneſs. In due Reverence to both theſe Attributes of God we are obliged to affirm that the *Senſe* as well as the *Letter* of the Scripture, in all Matters neceſſary either to be done or believed, hath been the *Depoſitum* of the Church,

Church, and Faithfully Preſerv'd under it's Keeping: That the whole Faith, which (as the Apoſtle ſays) was ἅπαξ, *at once delivered unto the Saints*, had at the ſame time its *Meaning* delivered; which from them has been derived by indubitable Teſtimony, as the Matter of our uniform Belief: That the different Opinions, Sects and Factions in the World, are no Argument againſt This; Becauſe as St. *Peter* has warn'd us, They who diverſifie the Common Faith, do not *Interpret* but *Wreſt* the Scriptures; and (as St. *Paul* has obſerv'd) Diviſions and Hereſies ſpring not from *Ignorance*, but from *Carnality*; not from want of Light, but want of Love: Pride and Envy and Contention and Vanity, and ſuch contrarious Paſſions, have in all Ages, not been at a Loſs for Truth, but have been contriving and ſetting up ſomewhat they liked better. And let us ſee, in the next place, what it was that the particular Affections of *Socinus* liked better than the received Interpretations.

He and his Party are pleas'd to take offence that there are any Myſteries in Religion; They will have nothing for the Object

Object of our Faith but what is plain to our Underſtanding, and eaſy to our apprehenſion; and altho' they will not affirm that Reaſon has the Meaſure of what *is* or what may *be*; yet they reſolve Reaſon to have the Meaſure of what ought to be *believed:* Which I think is Abſurdity ſufficient.

They conclude thereupon that the Doctrine of the Incarnation, that is, of God *Taking our Fleſh, and dwelling among us*, muſt not be believed, becauſe it is Irrational: And as for the Doctrine of the Trinity it would be offenſive to pious Ears to repeat thoſe expreſſions of Reproach, with which they load it. They ſay that theſe Doctrines do juſtly ſcandalize *Jews* and *Turks*, and hinder them from coming in to our Religion. But as it is no Office of Civility to complement away our Faith; ſo neither is it any Office of Charity in the *Socinians* to go off from the Foundation to meet *Jews* and *Turks*; and to turn Half-Infidels, that They may turn Half-Chriſtians. But after all, when by the groſſeſt wreſting of Words, and abuſe of plain Senſe, they have ſhewed themſelves as much Friends to Fancy, as they are Ene-

mies to Faith; after that they have interpreted all Myſteries out of Religion, and ſo made their new Hypotheſis familiar and inoffenſive, and therefore Credible, as they would have us imagine; We muſt pronounce upon it, what *Minucius* ſometimes did in the like Caſe, *In Incredibili Verum, in Credibili Mendacium; Truth ſtill lies on the Incredible, and Falſhood on the Credible ſide.*

And to juſtifie this Cenſure, let us conſider, *That the Myſtery of any thing, or (what is all one) The Abſtruſe or Incomprehenſible Nature of any thing, is no Argument againſt our believing it.*

This is a Rule, I am ſure, that holds true in Nature, and then with what Face can we deny it to hold true in Religion? We ſurrender our Faith to the ſtate of all *Viſible* things, without comprehending them; and what Obſtinacy is it then to refuſe our Faith to the *Things of God* under the ſame Condition? It would be an affront and calumny to Nature, to affirm that *Thoſe things which are before us*, thoſe Works of God which lie every Moment under our Senſes, are *ſimply* Credible; that is, ſuch as our Reaſon would Perſwade us *could* be, if

if we had not *ſeen* them to be: How ſhort is our Plummet from Fathoming, the Eſſence, Mode, Powers, Operations, Productions of the moſt common Beings? Undoubtedly had we the Knowledge of this World we live in, as we have that of its Maker only from a Book, I ſay, had we the Knowledge of this World we live in only from a Book, we ſhould be Tempted to treat that Book with as little Reverence, as the *Socinians* or *Deiſts* have done the Holy Scriptures: And conclude that moſt of the things that are in it were as Incomprehenſible, Impoſſible and therefore Incredible, as they fancy any thing to be that God has revealed concerning himſelf.

Let me produce an Inſtance or two, and thoſe out of the Holy Scriptures, to inculcate by the way, That the Philoſophical Truths we meet with *there*, are Venerable as well as the Divine.

In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth, ſays the Sacred Hiſtory: Where the Word *Created* is interpreted by all to mean, That God made the World without any Pre-exiſtent Matter to make it of; Now this Production of the World

we believe from the Authority of the Report; and likewiſe becauſe of the Abſurdities that neceſſarily follow from the Suppoſal of the contrary: And yet Human Reaſon could never form any Idea whereby to conceive the Poſſibility of ſuch a Production: And let any one ſay whether it be harder to believe, *That the Divine Eſſence did from everlaſting emanate or flow into Three Social and Co-eternal Subſiſtences*, than to believe, That *in the Beginning of Time All things were made out of Nothing*: Or whether Reaſon has more Arguments to plead for the One, than for the Other.

Holy *Job* to exemplifie the Power of God, pitches upon this Inſtance, *ch.* 26. 7. *He hangeth the Earth upon Nothing*; or (as his Expreſſion points elſewhere) *He maketh it ſtand firm without a Foundation*: Now when we find it impoſſible for the utmoſt Art of Man to make a ſmall Clod of Earth hang in the Air, It is naturally Impoſſible for Man to conceive, how the *whole Maſs* ſhould hang in the Air: Tis true when we ſee how things *are*, we Pride our ſelves in aſſigning of Reaſons why they *muſt* be ſo, but all fall ſhort of ſolving the Difficulty: Center

ter or Magnetiſm or whatever Notions have been eſpouſed, will not Solve it in the preſent Inſtance: No Cauſe could make the Earth hang upon Nothing, but the Omnipotence of that Will that ordered it to be ſo. Nor could we ever believe it, but from a Submiſſion of our Faith to that Omnipotence; Or from a Submiſſion to our Senſes, even while they control and muzzle the Reluctancy of our Reaſon.

For another Inſtance of the Incomprehenſible Works of God, The Sea is alledg'd in the ſame Book (*cap.* 38.) Of which tis ſaid, *That God has eſtabliſht its place by his Decree, and ſet Barrs and Doors before it, and ſaid to it, Hitherto ſhall thy proud Waves come, and no farther.* Which Obſervation is founded upon the convexity or roundneſs of the Surface of thoſe Waters; in reſpect of which (as the Pſalmiſt naturally expreſſes it) *They ſtand upon a heap:* A heap as miraculous, were it not more common, as That the *Iſraelites* paſt thro' in the Red Sea: For in this heap the Waters are bound up, that (as the Pſalmiſt expreſſes it) *They turn not again to cover the Earth*; which by the common Laws of

of Motion, they otherwiſe muſt neceſſarily do, and pour in upon every Shore a Deluge inſtead of a Tide. Reaſon uninform'd by Experience of this ſtate of things could not poſſibly believe it, and yet how wild would the Man be thought that ſhould not believe it?

Once more --- The Pſalmiſt for an Inſtance of the ſame kind, takes it from the frame of our own Being, *I am fearfully and wonderfully made:* To conſider the Curiouſneſs of our Frame is amazing and to reflect upon the Power that orders it to be ſo, is no leſs than Tremendous. Let me inſtance but in one Particular, whereof I will borrow the Hint from *Solomon* in his deſcription of old Age, *Eccl.* 12. 6. *Or ever the Wheel be broken at the Ciſtern:* Which Expreſſion cannot be interpreted ſo Genuinly of any thing, as of that Spring and Pulſe in the Heart, which begins the Circular Motion of our Blood; Let us conſider, in this Inſtance, How our Blood a ponderous Body, (contrary to the Laws of common Nature) aſcends without reluctancy, and deſcends without Precipitation; is of ſo many different Colours, under ſo many Forms of digeſtion, moves ſo many Years with-

without any influence of our Thought or Reflection, and when it ceaſes takes Life away with it ſelf. Let any weigh theſe Circumſtances, and he may well cry out with the ſame Holy Writer, *Such Knowledge is too Great and Excellent for me, I cannot attain unto it.* And yet none of this Myſtery is an Argument againſt believing it.

I need Inſtance no farther: Nature is full of Myſteries and Incomprehenſible Things, and may we think then that the Nature or Subſiſtence of God can be Reveal'd to us, and not admit a Myſtery? We account thoſe *Iſraelites* were very groſs Logicians, who thus argu'd *Pſal.* 78. *He ſmote the ſtony Rock indeed, that the Waters guſhed forth; But can he give Bread alſo, and provide Fleſh for his People?* That is, although we acknowledge that God has done *this* Miracle, we will not believe he can do *another*: But it is yet *more groſs* arguing for any one to ſay, I believe the *Works* of God, altho' they are Incomprehenſible; But I will not believe any thing of *God himſelf*, unleſs I comprehend it.

'Tis true, we believe theſe Incredible things in Nature, becauſe we ſee them:

But

But then, may not our *Ears* bring in as good Evidence as our *Eyes?* Certainly we are leſs obnoxious to Deception in *hearing* what God ſpeaks, than we are in *ſeeing* what Nature exhibits.

But this ſtill is the Queſtion which the *Socinians* will not ſuffer to be begg'd: They affirm that God has not *ſpoken* any Myſteries concerning either himſelf, or his Methods of our Redemption; They ſay our Interpreters have coin'd theſe Myſteries: Whereas *Their* Interpretation has voided them, and made them all plain.

And here (I confeſs again) Reaſon has a proper Province to act in; For altho' Reaſon is not to preſcribe the Matter of our Belief; Revelation is to do That; yet Reaſon is a proper Judge whether ſuch or ſuch a Matter is Revealed or no: For this conſiſts only in apprehending the Senſe of plain Words; which every Man's underſtanding has an equal Right to pretend to.

Whereas therefore *Socinus* ſays he had a favourable regard to *Jews* and *Turks* in his Interpretation of the Scripture; let them fairly be call'd in, and ſuffered to Interpret

pret for themſelves. *They are Scandaliz'd at the Belief of a Trinity*; Be it ſo: But when they ſee in the Scriptures, That there are *Three* to whom we are *devoted* in our Baptiſmal Covenant; Three in whom we muſt *believe*; To whom we muſt *pray*; By whom we muſt *bleſs*, to whom we muſt give *Worſhip and Glory*: Undoubtedly they will believe a Trinity, as ſoon as they will believe that the Scriptures do *not Teach* One.

They are averſe from believing that Jeſus was God; Be it ſo: But when they ſee it expreſs in Scripture, That he, who in time was Jeſus, *was God from everlaſting*; that when he took our Fleſh upon him, *He thought it no Robbery to be equal with the Father*; That He it is, *who in the beginning laid the Foundations of the Earth, and the Heavens are the work of his hands*: Undoubtedly they will as ſoon believe that Jeſus is Truely God, as they will believe that the Scriptures do not ſay he is.

Let them ſee How when our Bleſſed Lord was charged *with Blaſphemy* for making himſelf *Equal* with God; he denyed not the matter, but only abſolved it from

the Crime: How at his moſt Solemn Devotion, when about to leave the World, he prayed on this manner: *And now (O Father) Glorifie me with the Glory which I had with thee before the World was:* Undoubtedly they will conclude, That if what the *Socinians* ſay be True, (*viz.*) That he was not God, *Neither was he a Good Man:* For all this deportment can imply no leſs than, that he *affected to be accounted* God, and ſo he was ambitious (ev'n ſacrilegiouſly ambitious) of that Honour to which he had no Title; and this no Good man could be.

In fine. Let Jews and Turks be admitted of the Jury, and they will undoubtedly give Verdict; That if we are deceived in our Common Faith, that Spirit that dictated the Scriptures could deſign no leſs than that we ſhould be deceived. Let thoſe who have given occaſion to ſuch Reflections as theſe, find out a Reply whereby to ſtave off their Reproach.

In the mean time I may obſerve that the *Socinians* have been Unlucky in the execution of their main deſign: For they have not purged Myſtery out of the Scripture

They

They have only *changed its Place:* They have taken Myſtery out of *the Doctrine* of the Scripture, Where it was Venerable, and Worthy the Majeſty of God; and they have placed it *in the phraſe of* the Scripture where it is opprobrious and repugnant to God's Sincerity. For Example, Expounding *Joh.* 1. 1. They ſay, That, *In the beginning was the Word*, ſignifies no more than that Chriſt *was*, when he was born: That, *The Word was with God*, ſignifies nothing elſe, but That Chriſt was taken up into Heaven to receive Inſtructions for his ſubſequent Errand; That, *The Word was God*, ſignifies no more than, That he was God's Meſſenger; That, *All things were made by him, and without him nothing was made, that was made*; ſignifies only, That he was to preach the Goſpel, by Virtue whereof Men were to be made New Creatures. What Myſtery and Riddle do they make of theſe Expreſſions; and how remote is that Meaning from the Reach of a Rational Conjecture?

Amidſt this Romantick Pains of Interpreting, They met with a Text in the

General Epiſtle of St. *John*, (*viz.*) *There are Three that bear witneſs in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghoſt, and theſe Three are One*; which ſo baffled their Invention, that they deſpair'd of ever accomodating it to their Scheme. Whereupon the Brethren of *Tranſylvania* thought it their wiſeſt way to Vote this Epiſtle out of the Canon; But being inſtructed that there were ſome Copies of the Bible wherein this Text was not found, they concluded it for their Advantage to let the Epiſtle paſs for Canonical, but the Text for *Spurious and Forged*: And hereupon there grew a great Triumph over the *Trinitarian* Cauſe; but a Triumph without any poſſible Victory; For the Cauſe does not want ev'n the *Text*, much leſs a Forgery of it to ſupport it ſelf withal.

Tis alledg'd that this Text was not read in thoſe Copies that were in vulgar Uſe at the time of the Council of *Nice*; becauſe otherwiſe it would certainly have been cited againſt the *Arians*: However this be, tis as certain that this Text was read in thoſe Copies that were in uſe *before* the

the Council of *Nice*; For St. *Cyprian* aſſerting the Unity of the Church, notwithſtanding it conſiſted of ſeveral Congregations, Argues it from the Unity of the God-head altho' conſiſting of ſeveral Perſons, And cites This Text for his Proof.

And *Tertullian* aſſerting This to be the Chriſtian Doctrine, That the Father, Son and Holy Ghoſt, were each of them God, and yet the God-head not Divided, proves it from This Text, *Hi tres Unum ſunt.* And then he remarks from the Gender that they were not *Unus* but *Unum*, *i.e.* not One in *Perſon*, but One in *Eſſence.*

Thus it was before the Council of *Nice*, and within half an Age after that Council *Damaſus* Biſhop of *Rome* (perceiving from common Complaints, that many Differences were crept into the ſeveral Copies of the Scripture) imploy'd St. *Jerome*, the moſt expert Man in *Biblick* Learning that was in the World, to beſtow his Pains in rectifying thoſe Errors. And he having Copies ſent to him from all Parts of the World (as himſelf expreſſes it) and conferring them together, among many other Emenda-

Emendations from the Authority of those Copies that were most Ancient and Authentick, he restored this Text, with a Brand of Unfaithfulness upon those who first omitted it: So that all the Fault concerning this Text can lie only on those who first *left it out*; And what side of the Controversie that Fault can affect, let any one Judge.

I mention this by the By, and only to give some Caution against the Artifice of the present *Socinian* Factors; who insinuate with Hands lifted up that the *Trinitarian* Cause must needs be desperate, when it could be reduc'd to such mean shifts as the forging of a Text for its support: Which as it is a Calumny that may indeed shock the Surpriz'd; so all that are at leisure to open their Eyes, may see it has no Foundation.

Upon the whole, we find that the *Trinitarian* Cause asserted it self sufficiently against *Arius*, altho' his Opposition was *more* formidable than any others can be: Because his Hypothesis came by little and little

little to be ſo finely ſpun, that many Good Men profeſſed they could hardly ſee that the Difference of the Controverſie lay more than in Words; and that *Erat quando erat*, which they only inſiſted upon (being applyed to the Term of a Rational duration not a Temporary one) was not competent to juſtifie ſuch Uncharitable Diviſions.

But as for the *Socinians*, their Hypotheſis is Groſſer and Looſer, more Abſurd and more Precarious, and therefore neither their Arts nor Arguments can ever be ſo formidable. God averting the Judgment of removing the Candleſtick from an unworthy Age: For under that Determination the *Weakeſt* Means will be ſufficient to undo us.

I inſiſted upon *Thomas* (at the beginning of this Diſcourſe) as a Pattern of the *Socinians* Incredulity: But *Thomas* being vouchſafed an irreſiſtible Conviction, made what amends he was able, by Crying out *My Lord, and my God!* Which the Chriſtian World has hitherto lookt upon as the Orthodox Confeſſion of our Faith in Chriſt. But the *Socinians*, to *avoid this*

part

part of his Example, are pleas'd to expound his Confeſſion in this Myſterious manner, They ſay, that the Firſt Compellation *My Lord*, was directed to Chriſt; implying that *Thomas* acknowledg'd him to be his very Lord and Maſter; But the ſecond Compellation *My God*, was only an effect of Admiration, and was directed by an Apoſtrophe to God in Heaven, and meant no more than Men ordinarily do, when admiring they Cry, *O God! what a wonderful thing is this?*

Alas! That theſe Men would let Reaſon and Modeſty work on them ſo far as to reſtore Myſtery to its proper Place in the Book of God! To let it be in *Things*, where it is Adorable, and to remove it from *Words*, where it is Ridiculous! That they would allow *Thomas* to have ſpoken Truth, and plain Senſe in the Form of his Confeſſion! And That he is through all Ages more wiſely Imitable in his Retractation, than in his Unbelief! That they would not give Covert to their Obſtinacy under this deluding Axiom, *We cannot believe what we* Will, *We muſt have Reaſon for what we believe!*

lieve! Since it is the higheſt Act of Reaſon to ſubmit our Aſſent to that Teſtimony that cannot deceive us: And ſince it is the next Act of Reaſon to receive that Teſtimony in the moſt natural Senſe of the Words wherein it is deliver'd: And ſince it is equally an Act of Reaſon to believe, that whatſoever is Revealed relating to God, *The more Incredible it ſeems, the more Credible it is:* Becauſe if what is Revealed concerning God were always adapted to our Comprehenſion, how could it *reach*, or with any fitneſs repreſent that Nature, which we allow to be Incomprehenſible?

But farther to evince the Deceit of that Axiom, *We cannot believe what we Will, we muſt have Reaſon on our ſide:* Experience will make it appear that *Will* has frequently more influence upon our Belief than Reaſon has. Tis an old Rule built upon juſt Obſervation; That *What we would willingly have, we eaſily Believe.* And let any one aſſign a Cauſe why moſt Men ſhould think ſo *Particularly* concerning

cerning themſelves, concerning their own Talents, Properties and Opinions, ſo that no in different By-ſtander is able to think the ſame, If it be not This, That Fondneſs can carry it above Reaſon; and where Affection takes Place, their Judgment becomes partial and blind and pronely Seducible. And as *Will* has ſuch an Influence upon our Belief, ſo be ſure it has the ſame upon our not Believing: There is no cauſe aſſignable for our not believing many Things ſo eminent as this that we are not *Willing* to believe them: We refuſe our Aſſent as often for want of Inclination as we do for want of Argument: And looking into the bottom of Motives and Pretences, we ſhall find a Truth well worth our Obſerving, (*viz.*) *That what Men at firſt call Reaſon, and afterwards Conſcience; is oftentimes no other then Affection and Prejudice and Willfulneſs crept into the Chair.*

I have neither time nor need to inſiſt any farther for the Proof of that thing I purpoſed. From the Conſiderations already offer'd,

offer'd, I think we may ſafely conclude, That an humble and ready Faith *(Caſting down Imaginations, and every thing that exalts it ſelf againſt the Knowledge of Chriſt)* is the only Expedient both to make and to keep Men Wiſe.

To the Author and Finiſher of our Faith God bleſſed for ever, be all Glory and Thankſgiving World without End.

FINIS.